

IRI Quarterly Report, Final Report: January 1 – March 31, 2005
Belarus: Exit Polling for October 2004 Parliamentary Elections
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. DCG-A-00-01-0004-00
Project Dates: September 1, 2004—January 31, 2005
Total Budget: \$162,287 Expenses to Date: \$163,660
Project Code: 7063

I. Summary

The International Republican Institute's (IRI) program objective in Belarus is to support the institutional survival of Belarusian democratic organizations and strengthen the political skills of democratic party leaders and activists. IRI works to accomplish this objective through assistance to reform-oriented parties and specialized training for democratic youth and women.

II. Background

IRI began providing assistance to Belarusian democrats in April 1997. Since that time, IRI has structured its programming efforts on three components: party building and literature distribution, coalition building for political party leaders and activists, and training for reform-oriented youth. These programs are the foundation of IRI's mission to support the institutional survival of democratic organizations and help their leaders and activists prepare for public policy roles in a future democratic Belarus.

In an effort to assist the effort to promote fair and free democratic elections in Belarus, IRI trained domestic party poll watchers to monitor early voting as well as the conduct of the election on election day. In addition, IRI conducted exit polling on the day of the election. Exit polling provides a more accurate representation of voter intent than other methods of election monitoring including parallel vote counts. Exit polling relies upon how people say they voted while parallel counts rely on double-checking the ballots already in the ballot box. Parallel counts can not account for pre-marked ballots or ballot stuffing. Exit polling can reveal voters' true intent rather than the predetermined outcome of the authorities. At the same time, like parallel counts, exit polling does have certain deficiencies. In certain environments, voters may not wish or be able to reveal accurate information on how they voted.

III. Program Activities

In an effort to accurately ascertain the true results of the election, IRI worked with Baltic Surveys, a division of the Gallup organization, to conduct exit polling during the Early Voting and on the day of the election with a representative cross-section of voters. A combined 37,602 people were interviewed during Early Voting and on Election Day. Polling sites were chosen by geography and demography in an effort to obtain a statistically balanced model of the entire electorate. Polling was carried out by the Gallup organization, using a local non-partisan partner.

According to our data, the final result of the referendum in Belarus had 48.4% voting age-population voting yes. This was below the 50% threshold required to change the Belarusian Constitution and outside the +/-1% margin of error for surveys of this sample size. The results released by the Belarusian government had 77% voting in favor of the referendum. The international media used the results of our polling data to prove the amount of fraud at the hands of the Lukashenko regime.

It also important to note that based on the exit polling, Belarusians did not simply vote against Lukashenko, but voted demonstrably for pro-democratic candidates running for parliament. Ultimately, the lesson of the parliamentary elections for democrats in Belarus is that with a unified democratic opposition, united behind a single candidate, they have an opportunity not only to compete, but to win the support of a majority of Belarusians.

During the month of January IRI completed the program and closed out trailing costs that remained.

IV. RESULTS AND INDICATORS

The overall objective of IRI's activities was to increase the transparency of the October 2004 electoral process as a measure of political development in Belarus.

Objective #1: Increased transparency of the electoral process, including prevention, documentation, and publication of cases of electoral fraud.

- Result 1: Help prevent and document electoral fraud;

Indicator 1: Coverage by international media

The results of the IRI/Gallup poll were cited in articles in The Washington Post, BBC, Moscow News, The Guardian, The New York Times, The Miami Herald, The Irish Times, and the Christian Science Monitor.

Objective #2: Increased technical and logistical capacity of Belarusian public opinion research firms to design, conduct, and publish the results of exit and similar public opinion polls.

- Result 1: Equip a local organization with the capacity to conduct exit polling to provide a parallel estimate of the vote count.

Indicator 1: Local organization carries out polling on during Early Voting and on Election Day.

Baltic Surveys, a division of the Gallup organization interviewed 19,205 people during Early Voting and 18,397 people on Election Day.

Objective #3: Broad dissemination and publication within Belarus and internationally of the findings of political party observers and exit pollsters.

- Result 1: To disseminate and publish the initial results of the exit poll promptly after the conclusion of polling.

Indicator 1: Results published promptly after polling concludes.

The results were released at 8:30 pm local time on Russian television channel NTV. The results were also covered by Russian channels REN and ORD and later picked up by independent media in Belarus.

- Result 2: To disseminate and publish observation results to indicate the character of the elections, as well as the degree to which effective observation of the electoral process was permitted or restricted.

Indicator 1: Coverage of elections in international media

The results of the IRI/Gallup poll were cited in articles in The Washington Post, BBC, Moscow News, The Guardian, The New York Times, The Miami Herald, The Irish Times, and Christian Science Monitor. The results of the election were universally panned by all of these publications and others.